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Ambivalent Attachment — Melancholia and Political Activism in Contemporary Palestine
Lotte Buch Segal

Lotte Buch Segal is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen

Running Head: Ambivalent Attachment

Contact Information:

Email: lotte.buch.segal@anthro.ku.dk

Abstract: This article argues that over the course of the past three decades a mood change has occurred in terms of how Palestinians relate to the ideal of an independent Palestinian state. During the first Intifada, from 1987 to 1993, which constitutes the golden age of Palestinian resistance towards Israel's occupation, the Palestinian resistance movement was characterized by a passionate belief in the possibility of a revolutionary transformation. Due to the consistent stalemate and even worsening of the conflict that have followed in the wake of the Second Intifada, from 2000 to 2003, this passionate belief in the realization of a Palestinian State has been replaced by ambivalence toward that ideal. Based on insights from my intermittent fieldwork with families of Palestinian political prisoners from 2004 to 2011, this article suggests that the contemporary ambivalence surrounding the revolutionary project can be meaningfully analyzed using Freud's notion of melancholia. In Freud, melancholia accounts for the relation between a feeling of indeterminate loss and ambivalent attachment. The notion of melancholia thereby provides anthropology with a concept that can be used to name and explore the frayed attachment to the ideal of a Palestinian state in the context of an ongoing colonial occupation. The passionate politics of the First Intifada enabled a fusing of Palestinian personhood with the overall political project into a subject characterized by active resistance. In contrast, the ambivalent attachment that marks the link between self and state project in the Palestinian territories after the Second Intifada leads to a mood of melancholia. By analyzing the attachment to the political project as an indeterminate loss in the melancholic's ego, I argue that the Palestinian political project is part of the self and keeps its adherents in a repetitive temporal fold from which they are unable to escape, because they are obliged and compelled to keep fighting for a state that does not seem to materialize. Conceptually, melancholia has the capacity to elucidate the emotional and deeply intersubjective toll it takes to live and aspire to an ideal that seems further from realization by the hour.

Keywords: melancholia, loss, political engagement, ambivalence, memory

For whom did you do this? [From a daughter's letter to her father in prison]

The daughter of a Palestinian woman, whose life will frame the article incisively, wrote these words in a letter to her activist father, who is incarcerated in Israel and has been so since 2001. The question seems innocent enough, the provocative words of a teenage daughter annoyed with and perhaps even mourning her father's prolonged absence. In the context of contemporary Palestine, however, her words gesture at ambivalent aspects of the attachment to the Palestinian political project. Posing such a question in a letter to an imprisoned father is no small feat. Yet life as a daughter of a significant figure of the Palestinian left has not been uncomplicated either. Her father was an activist when she was a toddler, haunted by the Israeli Defence Force in her early childhood, and likely to remain imprisoned beyond the day she will be married. Her father has been a hero she could read about in the papers but not be with on an everyday basis, because he devoted his life to working for the ideal of a Palestinian state to come true in order, not least, for his daughter to anticipate a better life, free from occupation. I will return to how his engagement in the struggle has caused his family immense torment. Her question to him, however, has ramifications beyond their relationship, given that she knows, as does her father, that any incoming, or outgoing, correspondence to or from a Palestinian prisoner in Israeli detention is read by representatives of the Israeli state. Allowing the enemy, as it were, to know that to the Palestinians, activities of resistance are not necessarily worth the effort, is as close to abandonment of the struggle for freedom as one could get. It opens up the poisonous question, whether the Palestinians are so exhausted by the brutality of the occupation that the public support to keep fighting for it is waning. By posing the question about the worth of the struggle the daughter fundamentally challenges the idea that being Palestinian equals an attachment to resist the occupation and to fight, in different ways, to achieve its termination. In occupied Palestine, the daughter's words to her father are thus nothing less than scandalous. She questions the acts that sent him to prison, acts cast and praised elsewhere, in public discourse, as heroic resistance to the occupation of Palestine.

Tobias Kelly (2010) has shown how suspicion creeps into social relations in the occupied West Bank, and he challenges those heroic narratives. In this article, I would like to suggest that there is a deeper layer of suspicion, in fact ambivalence at play here too, that questions whether the long-standing struggle against the occupation is felt to be worth the loss of lives, limbs, and years of so many Palestinians from the perspective of the wives and children of these men. This form of ambivalence does not only concern the meaning of the past. Rather, being ambivalent about the worth of the struggle, as the daughter in the letter is, propels into the future and casts present commitment to resistance in a skeptical light too. In order to explicate the effects of the temporal underpinnings of the current emotional investment in the Palestinian political project for those participating on the sidelines, namely the relatives of the political activists, I propose that Sigmund Freud's notion of melancholia provides anthropology with a concept that can be used to name and explore precisely this residual layer of ambivalence and how it relates to the ideal of a Palestinian state. Freud's assumption that in melancholia people may register the loss or the threat of losing an ideal as a feeling of indeterminate loss, allows us to think of melancholia in contemporary Palestine not as an individual pathology but as an intersubjective sentiment of ambivalent attachment to the ideal of the Palestinian political project.

Mourning and Grief in Anthropology

Loss has been well studied in anthropology, and its conventional tools go some of the way in helping us to understand the ramifications of Palestine as the lost ideal. Anthropologists primarily explore loss and bereavement through its public rituals, cultural schemes, and practices (Bloch and

Parry 1982; Boret 2012; Brison and Leavitt 1995; Briggs 2014; High 2011; Robben 2012[2004]; Saint Cassia 2005). This emphasis is unsurprising, since anthropology is preoccupied with observable forms of human behavior—the visible and audible expressions of loss, say, in the form of lament (Briggs 2014; High 2011). Making the case for an anthropology of bereavement, Jason Throop argues for the importance of investigating anthropologically those areas of human experience that western epistemology tends to categorize as interior. Throop (2010a, 2014) proposes that anthropology attend to moods, given their salience as durative existential modalities that extend beyond a narrow understanding of emotions as residing in an individual register.

Much of anthropology, however, particularly in the continental tradition, assigns these areas of inquiry to psychology.¹ Among a number of exceptions from this rule,² Ellen Corin (2012) has argued that particularly when it comes to studies of subjective experience, the dialogue between anthropology and psychoanalysis may be productive. Veena Das is one such scholar who has worked on the gendered expression of mourning and grief in the aftermath of the brutal violence that came about during the 1947 Partition between India and Pakistan. A vital concern in Das's work is the enmeshment of the extraordinary and the ordinary and how violence and grief are braided into acts of care and aspiration for the well-being of kin and community (Das 2007:2014). Her work emphasizes how grief is expressed or defies expression, not because it is seen as too private or as residing in the bodily realm of the preobjective but because collective language has no place for such forms of grief. Building on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, a fundamental premise of Das's work (2007, 2015) is that the subject emerges as a singularity from a form of life. Wittgenstein's notion of the "form of life" (2009[1953]: §244–271) is a way of imagining human beings as fundamentally related through language and intelligibility to the extent that a private language that pertains to the singular subject does not exist. Das's analysis of the lacing of grief and gendered subjectivity in the wake of violence runs as an undercurrent in my excavation of indeterminate loss among relatives of Palestinian political activists. In this spirit, and through engagement with Freud's idea of melancholia, I hope to offer an analysis of loss without a clear referent; in fact, loss that does not even surface as loss, but as ambivalence toward the political project that is part and parcel of being a Palestinian.

Three issues emerge for me as an anthropologist engaging with this psychoanalytic construct. One concerns the role of temporality in melancholia. Mourning does not end in the state of melancholia: it continues. It has no reason to, but it persists all the same. In paying attention to temporality, I align myself with Angela Garcia and Charles Briggs (Briggs 2014; Garcia 2008), two of the anthropologists who have dealt with the question of duration, melancholia, and mourning.³ In her study of rehabilitative interventions for Hispanic drug users in New Mexico, Garcia argues that the therapeutic regimes employed to enable users to quit drugs are modeled on a chronicity model inspired by the Alcoholics Anonymous treatment formula. Her argument is that when the regime of chronicity merges with the colonial injustices that have marked Hispanic subjectivities, melancholia becomes an easily available mode of thinking about oneself in which hope of change is rendered unimaginable (Garcia 2008). Garcia's way of addressing the nexus of colonization and selfhood serves as an invitation for me to probe deeper into the enmeshment of temporality and subjectivity in Palestine, the obvious difference from Garcia's interlocutors being that the Palestinians are still colonized.

In his reading of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," Briggs (2014) discerns a permeable boundary between these two sentiments. Attentiveness to this permeability is an ethnographic necessity in my effort to untangle the multiple layers of loss that my interlocutors live with:

whereas some of their losses—of men, children, homes, and futures—may be and have in fact been mourned, they are imbricated in what I think of as an underlying mood of melancholic attachment to the political project. Acknowledging, however, that not every sentiment of grief in Palestine is melancholic, the ethnographic cases that follow allow me to tease out how particular historical conditions are conducive to mourning whereas others are not, thereby underlining Garcia's argument that it is the prerogative of colonialism to structure subjectivity in intricate ways.

Briggs (2014) also ventures the argument that we may think of anthropology itself as a gesture of mourning. This invitation to conceptualize the role of the anthropologist in our interlocutors' attempts to mourn seems profoundly needed in ethnographic locales where mourning is an unavoidable part of the lives that we as anthropologists claim to know. In her work on the Canadian state's care for the dying in the Inuit population, Lisa Stevenson (2014) suggests that mournfulness is interlaced with anthropological attention to areas of human life where death is always already present. Aligned with the work of Throop, such thoughts open up the possibility of mourning with our interlocutors, yet only insofar as we think of the anthropologist's aspiration to know the loss of others both as a process and as an implicit, albeit impossible, ideal.

Mourning and Melancholia in Freud

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud (1957[1917]) contrasts melancholia to the ostensibly natural course of mourning the loss of a loved object. Mourning, he writes "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition" (1957[1917]:243). While bracketing the idea of melancholia as a pathology, I believe the notion of melancholia has a role in furthering our understanding of how and why particular historical conditions become part of subjective ways of living with political ideals, emphasizing that these are not disembedded cognitive ideas but suffuse, rather, intersubjective emotional registers. Freud's thoughts on the cases relating to melancholy, where that which is lost is an ideal, are thus particularly illuminating. He writes that in some cases

one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. In yet other cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost, either. *This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.* This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object loss which is withdrawn from consciousness. [Freud 1957(1917):245, emphasis added]

The key difference between mourning and melancholia, in Freud's formulation, is nonetheless that mourning is a natural process of sorrow following a discrete loss. In contrast, melancholia confounds this process, because melancholy patients are unable to accept their loss and replace the lost object with someone else (1957[1917]:255). Such failure to detach oneself from the lost object and turn instead to the vital process of cathexis causes, according to Freud, melancholia. "In melancholia," Freud elaborates, "*the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict due to ambivalence. The ambivalence is either constitutional, i.e. is an element of every love-relation formed by this particular ego, or else it proceeds precisely from those experiences that involved the threat of losing the object*" (1957[1917]:256, emphasis added). Freud lays out a further defining feature between the two states: "The analogy with mourning led us to conclude that he had

suffered a loss in regards to an object; what he tells us points to a loss in his ego” (1957[1917]:247). Moreover, Freud asserts that the melancholy condition is a somatic condition (1957[1917]:253).

Three elements of Freud’s text direct my analysis of the ambivalent attachment to the political project in contemporary Palestine. For one, the inability to let go of the lost object and its fundamental relation to ambivalence is critical in an attempt to understand Palestinian women’s frayed relations with the Palestinian political project. Secondly, the location of a loss *in* the melancholy person rather than the patient suffering an object loss might elucidate the emotional investment in an ideal that has hitherto been far from victorious. Lastly, as Freud (1957[1917]) writes, melancholia proceeds from those experiences that involve the *threat* of losing the object.⁴ In the case of Palestine, melancholia may further understanding of the transition from the passionate politics of the First Intifada to the ambivalent attachment to the Palestinian state project after the Second Intifada and up to the present.

Endurance in Palestine– *Sumud* and Sadness

In my work with Palestinian wives of imprisoned men over the last nine years, I have encountered a sentiment of sadness that seemed to defy any relation to a discrete sense of loss. This sense of sadness invites anthropological responsiveness to a layer of Palestinian life that is not often in focus. In anthropology, the study of Palestinians tends to be framed through concepts of resistance, agency, and resilience, concepts that map onto the local idiom of *Sumud* as thoroughly described by Rosemary Sayigh (1993), Diana Allan (2013), Laleh Khalili (2007), and Lena Meari (2014). *Sumud* translates as “steadfastness” and “perseverance” and is rallied as an expression of endurance that contains too the hardship of the labor to endure, come what may. However, what this notion fails to acknowledge is that even among Palestinians, political activism has its costs, human and political. As I have written elsewhere, anthropologists need to attend to both the labor of endurance and to recognize its twin, namely the exhaustion of endurance, in order to fully grasp how people endure and at times succumb to resignation (Segal in press:15). To single out resilience from resignation in the case of Palestine makes little sense since they are entwined with the ways in which people aspire to make ordinary lives in the face of military occupation.⁵

Moving ahead anthropological thinking about the emotional toll it takes to live during protracted conflict necessitates a look at how psychological studies frame these consequences on the Palestinians. For instance, a study conducted after the Second Intifada (2000–2003) concluded that 51.3 percent of the adult Palestinian population suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), comorbid with Moderate Depression (Madianos et al. 2012).

In her book, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1989) argues that depression and melancholia may be thought of as a composite. Kristeva writes, that “according to classic psychoanalytic theory (Abraham, Freud, and Melanie Klein), depression, like mourning, conceals an aggressiveness toward the lost object, thus revealing the ambivalence of the depressed person with respect to the object of mourning” (1989:11). Kristeva’s assertion that depression and melancholia are fundamentally akin through their ambivalent attachment to the lost object offers an interesting reading of Madianos et al.’s (2012) conclusion that approximately half of the adult population in Palestine suffers from depression. If we accept Kristeva’s point, might we then read that which is accounted for as “individual depression” in Madianos et al. (2012) as melancholy at the collective level?⁶ Making such a bold move from the affliction of the individual psyche should not be seen as a collective diagnosis of the Palestinians. Rather, as proposed by Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2009), the conceptualization of Palestinian distress through psychiatric

diagnosis fails to capture how people are marked by the occupation and how they counter it through local idioms of heroism, and, indeed, *Sumud*. Yet, as I and others have argued, such emic notions of resilience are political constructs too and might feel as distant to how people live and endure as does a psychiatric diagnosis (Buch Segal 2014b; Feldman 2015).

A recent study of Palestinian wordings of distress concludes that in tandem with the conventional measurements of PTSD and depression, a representative, local expression of the consequences of living with the exhaustion of being occupied for years on end is “feeling broken” (Barber et al. 2016). This finding resonates with my attempt to think about how the pressure of the occupation and the obligation to keep fighting against it registers among the relatives who have to endure while their husbands and fathers fulfill this ideal.⁷

Most notably, the mood that compelled me to read Freud was not about an individual woman’s concrete loss of a husband or of years of conjugal life. It was a sentiment that escorted narratives, expressions, and bodily states across individuals to the extent that I would say it is a feature of the mood of several relatives of political activists in occupied Palestine. Reminiscent of what Freud described, this mood surfaced as an elusive sentiment of having lost or fearing the loss of something without knowing precisely the object of loss. Elsewhere I have documented how the derivative affliction of the wives of political activists confines them as women too (Buch Segal in press, 2015a, 2015b, 2014a). They live the absence of their husbands, fathers, and sons on an everyday basis, not knowing when their kin will be released, or in which state, and in yet other cases knowledge is certain that release will never happen. To further understanding of this ambivalent feeling intrinsic to this mood of sadness, I treat my interlocutors’ investment in the ideal of struggling to achieve freedom from occupation as precisely a kind of loss in the ego that Freud discerned in his melancholy patients.

Mourning Palestine?

Multiple layers of loss suffuse Palestinian collective life today. One of these layers is obvious: the thousands of people who have been killed due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To their kin, these people have a home in a language of martyrdom that is prominent in public as well as private spheres of expression. A second layer of loss is experienced by people who have lost years to their relatives’ incarceration in Israeli prisons. Since 1967, the number of incarcerated Palestinians amounts to more than 700,000, with around 6,000 Palestinians being detained in Israel at present, in 2016.⁸ Loss pertaining to imprisonment is expressed differently from the martyrdom associated with violent death in the Palestinian vernacular (Buch Segal in press, 2014a, 2014b) because imprisonment, despite its superficial resemblance to martyrdom, eludes a clear place in what may be thought of as a standing language of loss (Buch Segal 2014b; Das 1998; Wittgenstein 2009[1953]). Knitted even more indiscernibly into quotidian life are other forms of loss: the people who live with mental and physical wounds from minor incursions, trivial shootings, or perhaps shrapnel from explosives directed at their neighbors’ houses (Allen 2012; Grassiani 2013; Gren 2015).

Yet there is still another layer of loss that, in Kristeva’s words, fails to make it to symbolic elaboration (Kristeva 1989:46): This is the threat of losing the future for a Palestinian state, the anticipation of which has fueled the immense efforts of resistance to the occupation. It is the latent loss of an ideal —of freedom, of statehood—that goes nowhere, except to pieces.

This sentiment of indeterminate loss resonates with the dream—or the fantasy—of an attainable

paradise for many Palestinians, captured so precisely by Palestinian writer Mahmood Darwish (2010) in his book *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*. The book is a conversation between a boy and his father. They are talking about the Palestinian lands that were lost during *al-Nakba*, which translates into the catastrophe in 1948, where approximately 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homeland by the Jewish militia (Pappé 2006). In Darwish's book, the son asks his father a question about Palestine: "Is it the lost paradise then?" And the father replies,

Beware of this expression, because to believe it would be to surrender to a state of being that has reached its legal and existential limits. The difference between a lost paradise in its absolute sense and the lost paradise in its Palestinian meaning is that the former understanding would keep the condition of longing, and psychological and rightful belonging, out of the sphere of conflict. ... The idea of the lost paradise is tempting to those who are not possessed by a pressing question, but inflicts upon the Palestinian condition an accumulation of tears and weakness in the blood. This is how my homeland surpasses Paradise; it is like paradise but it is also attainable. (2010:9)

Palestine may be like paradise, the father explains, but it is not lost; it is attainable. It is precisely the ambivalence with regard to Palestine's attainability that interests me here. Although it is not limited to one group, such ambivalence is particularly resonant among women whose husbands have been imprisoned since the 1993 Oslo agreements and after the second Intifada. This is because the Israeli management of its penal justice system for Palestinian political activists has changed over time (Matar and Baker 2011). Before the Oslo agreements, the practice of administrative detention was widespread, such that Palestinians were in and out of Israeli prisons for shorter stretches of a few months. Without a sentence, these detainees were released, only to be recaptured by the Israel Defence Force (IDF). When political activists and their families recount memories of pre-Oslo activities of resistance, such narratives are accompanied by a sense of vivacity, of eyes glowing, bodies proudly posed, and an irreducible sense of solidarity and achievement. To illuminate this form of attachment to the Palestinian political project, I offer the story of a woman who can be said to embody the ideal of a Palestinian becoming, as a revolutionary subjectivity: Hadeel.

A Husband's Imprisonment During the First Intifada—The Time of My Life

Right after we entered her airy house on a summer day, Hadeel filled us in on her recent appearance on the Lebanese TV channel, LBC. Her voice was tinged with excitement. The station had contacted her because they wanted to showcase an extraordinary love story. Hadeel's marriage delivers precisely that. She belongs to the Christian community in Palestine. Both she and her husband formed part of a collective of people known to make up the backbone of a leftist group of activists. Due to the work of this group to counter the Israeli occupation, her then fiancé was imprisoned in 1985 until 1994.

During our visit, Hadeel gently asked her boy of 11 and girl of 12 to go outside to play. Meanwhile, she continued her story about how she was just back from the televised interview in Lebanon about the life and love of this particular political couple. Following the structure, I suspect, of her successful TV performance, Hadeel told us how the confinement of her husband had in fact become the time of her life, a defining period for her sense of self, both as a potential wife and mother, and not least a Palestinian. She recounted her story without any prompts or questions from me.

You know it was a very tough day, in the court. They sentenced him and his brother to ten years. We were shocked but we were strong. I was in a new job and I was on duty so I didn't

want to be absent from my shift. My closest colleagues asked me what had happened, and I remember trying to talk, but I fainted. All the strength, I fell down, I couldn't.

Although rehearsed through many retellings, Hadeel conveys how she felt the day her then-fiance was sentenced. The decision about whether to wait for his release without being certain that this was the right thing to do naturally caused her intense emotional turmoil. Yet after only a little while, she had made up her mind. And when she visited her fiancé in prison a few weeks later, she “was over it. I cried, but we regained our strength, not only me, all of us.” Hadeel vividly told us of how the community of activists around her fiancé held their breath concerning her decision about whether to wait for him or to leave him. Her decision to stay engaged to him reads as a revolutionary love story that embodies the notion of “political marriage” coined by Johnson et al. (2009) to be emblematic of marriages during the first Intifada.

Hadeel's narrative yields important insights about the pertinence of showing strength and perseverance in the face of political and personal defeat. Every time she voices a feeling of hardship in the excerpt above, she subsumes that feeling to other feelings—of strength, the satisfaction of political sacrifice, and the will to endure. There is no trace of ambivalence in her story. Moreover, the experiences of hardship she went through have come to an end. Her husband's imprisonment ended after nine years, as expected. Thus while lengthy, his absence could be mourned and therefore allowed her a sense of closure and temporal progression. Most notably his position as a central figure of the Palestinian left during the 1980s yielded solidarity from their political comrades. The narrative braiding of hardship and passion that suffuses Hadeel's story was pervasive among those involved in the first Intifada. Below I attend to the affective diminuendo in expressive style of current stories of activism that are traceable to the structural changes in the infrastructure of the conflict in the wake of the Oslo agreements.

Political Involvement and Narrative Genres after the Second Intifada

After the dust had settled, people understood the political defeat intrinsic to signing the Oslo agreements. Throughout the Second Intifada that ended in 2003, increased restrictions on mobility meant that relatives could not just come and visit at any odd time in the prisons, as had earlier been the case. Rather, the so-called separation wall and the division of the territory into areas a, b, and c,⁹ with complex variations in the legal and military division of labor between the Palestinian Authority and the state of Israel, complicated the permit application process to visit a relative in Israeli detention (Bishara 2015; Kelly 2006).

This meant that even with unwavering support for the political cause, the experience of living through detention as the absented wife today is different from the first Intifada from 1987 to 1993, the golden age of Palestinian resistance: people refer to this period when they need an example of solidarity among Palestinians to end the occupation of their land. As has been argued by other scholars of Palestine, such calls for solidarity ring differently at present, both in the West Bank and Gaza, and in the Palestinian diaspora (Allen 2012, 2013; Feldman 2015). As Yara, a Palestinian acquaintance, a political icon, and feminist beacon, said, “Oslo broke the revolution and us.” By “us” she meant the leftist organizations that had a strong presence during the First Intifada and in fact in the second Intifada as well.

The problem alluded to by Yara was that the ideals of the left were not de facto included in the Oslo agreements, which seemed to outsiders like a step toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians but, in reality, only allowed Israel deeper penetration into the legal and territorial grounds of the

Palestinians. Yara's words, "Oslo broke the revolution," suggests that years ago in Palestine, the revolution was a fact, but this is no longer the case.

To be sure, this is not to say that there is no resistance toward the occupation in today's Palestine. On many levels and in many groups of society there is still a practical investment in the collective struggle for Palestinian statehood, but if we compare narratives of the past with how political activism is spoken about now the engagement and vigor that accompanies the recollection of First Intifada stories seem to belong to a different affective register. Yet this revelation came to me only after having completed my graduate fieldwork on families of detainees whose imprisonment occurred during the Second Intifada. It seemed to me that the sentiments suffusing their lives could not have been further from the blend of passion and politics evident in Hadeel's account, although the ghost of such vitality hovered above their narratives. The differences are discernible in the slow voice, frequent sighs, and boredom and the familiar shrug of the shoulder that precedes the disclaimer "*shu 'bnsawwi*," which means "what can we do" in the light of restrictions, invasions, discrimination and the like.

At the time when I investigated the emotional aftermath of imprisonment and release upon the family in 2011, my assistant, Maysoon, was studying at an institute of higher education with former activists, many among whom were influential in the First Intifada. These still-committed activists now work in the NGO and the public sector in Palestine and thus exercise influence in ways that are not overtly revolutionary.¹⁰ They are, however, still discreetly influential in agenda setting, even with the rise of an Islamic politics across Palestine that is focused on reviving unrealized ideals (Allen 2012:187; Kublitz in press). As an interlocutor in the leftist community said, "Either you work with them [Fateh and the Palestinian Authority] and be a hypocrite like them, or you become a thief. Neither of these solutions will build Palestine nor will they return Palestine to us." She was alluding to the fact that even political activists need to feed their families, and with no support for the left in Palestine, people have to work in organizations that may not represent their personal politics. As such, revolutionary activists are as much white-collar workers in the Palestinian middle class as anyone else—maybe even more so given that many of them were among the first generation of Palestinians with university degrees, thus coming of age with an education closely braided with political activism. To provide a sense of the differences in living through the detention of kin during different tides of the conflict, I turn to the story of Suhaad. She is a professional nurse with four children; one of them is the girl who dared to ask the question, "For whom did you do this?" of her father in Israeli detention.

What Is Life to You?

I came to meet Suhaad through one of her neighbors, a man in his late thirties with a career in the NGO sector. After a conversation about the emotional changes his wife, Layali, observed in her husband upon his release from prison, and the effects this had on her, she said, "By the way, you have to meet my downstairs neighbor." When we finished our visit with Layali, we knocked on Suhaad's door, in order to acknowledge that we knew about her difficult circumstances. She looked worn when she opened the door but invited us to come by after work a couple of days later.

When we entered her home later that week, Suhaad had just come home from her shift in the local health center where she worked as a chief nurse. Like Hadeel and indeed many women in the leftist circle in Palestine, Suhaad is well educated and financially comfortable. A politically active leftist, her husband had been imprisoned during the Second Intifada and would be in prison for another six years at the time when we met. Before I had even asked a question she started talking about her life

in the two years when her husband was wanted by both the IDF and the Palestinian Authority. Suhaad said that in this period “they” harassed her and her children a lot. Maysoon and I naturally assumed that it was the Israeli army she spoke about. Suhaad however was not so sure. She said:

We never knew whether they were Israelis or [Palestinian] spies, we had no way of knowing that exactly. My husband was a fugitive, haunted by the Israeli army. During these years the Israelis used to come to the house on a daily basis. They used to do things that can’t even be described. After they arrested my husband we used to see knives outside the windows while we were asleep. A voice would rise up, like the howling of a wolf, after which my children usually left their rooms and came to sleep in my room. These were years in hell.

Whereas these incidents occurred regularly, one such transgressive intrusion stands out in its brutal singularity to Suhaad:

Once, they captured me, the girls, and Ayman, their little brother, in a room and separated us from Bilal. He was ten years old then. They took him to the bathroom and interrogated him, asking about his father’s whereabouts: ‘Does your father own a weapon or not? Does he come here or not?’ Bilal was young, and answered that he did not know. So, they broke a glass on the floor and forced him to walk on it. At last they got a grenade and put it on his chest while pointing their gun against his head. They told him that if he didn’t say where his father was they would explode him and shoot him in the head. At that moment he started yelling and crying and escaped from them and ran to me—I was in another room while hearing my son shouting and crying and I could not do anything about it.

The words of Suhaad convey how a specific event of intrusion into her home simultaneously crystallizes the return of numerous other transgressions by the Israel Defence Force. While admitting to feelings of fear and powerlessness in the face of such intrusions, Suhaad in the same breath conveys how she and her children habitually stayed up waiting for the IDF to come. The event was anticipated to the extent that the family knew that the soldiers would knock on the door and at what time. In an account ripe with profound themes of what it means to be accustomed to political persecution in the most material of senses, Suhaad shares with us how being used to something did not desensitize her fear for her own and even more so her children’s well-being. Her narrative thereby reminds us about the enmeshment of the ordinary and the extraordinary, which characterizes everyday life during conflict (Das 2007). Suhaad’s story compels me to take up the issue of return.

Elsewhere I have argued that the return that is intrinsic to repetition is inescapably uncanny insofar as each repetition also involves elements that despite recurrence cannot, ever, be known in advance (Buch Segal 2013; Freud 1963[1919]). This kind of uncanny return characterizes the IDF’s nightly intrusions in Suhaad’s home. Suhaad knew they would come, but the “they”—uncannily—does not always signify the same entity. Suhaad was, in fact, not entirely sure that it was only the Israeli Defence Force that was bothering them; the violent intrusions were the IDF, but she did not know who was responsible for the faceless sounds and sights. She leaves open the question of whether it could be fellow Palestinians, thereby gesturing at the intricate maze of suspicion of betrayal that envelops the families of those imprisoned (Kelly 2010). Whereas there is a great deal of unequivocal public praise of the Palestinian prisoners, detention invites questions regarding the actual heroism of the convict. For one, detention allows speculation about whether the prisoner is in fact a political prisoner or simply someone who committed acts of petty crime. Second, being imprisoned in Israel raises/elicits the lurking question of whether a convict will succumb to the

pressure during interrogation. Comments made in passing as I conducted my fieldwork reminded me that even among neighbors, political comrades and, not least, family, rumors circulate about who has informed the Israelis about the acts of a particular convict, thereby causing his or her imprisonment (Buch Segal in press, 2013).

The deeply penetrating suspicion by neighbors appears tangibly in Suhaad's account. She shares with us a time that has left profound and painful markers of the conflict on herself and her children. Coming to the fore is her memory of the early years of her husband's time as a fugitive. These years do not return to her through the consoling knowledge of how her community helped her get through those years, as is the case in Hadeel's account. Quite the opposite. In fact, by waiting for the soldiers in the living room, it was she who tried to protect her neighbors from being bothered during the night. Whether this was also a way to stave off rumors about liaisons between herself and her family and the IDF is not for me to say. Yet the hurt in her account derives also from the suspicion that the people bothering her family may be Palestinian and not Israeli and shows us that assumptions about solidarity among Palestinians are painfully complicated. As stated earlier, the Oslo agreements only further deepened the rifts between different factions in Palestine; the left was one of those factions that were in opposition to the Palestinian Authority (Allen 2012; Meari 2014).

In between the coherent narrative of the past, Suhaad spoke about herself as a mother of four, wife of a prisoner, and a professional woman. On both our visits, she made frequent use of the word "pressure," to the extent that Maysoon, being a technical laboratory worker, asked her "Do you have blood pressure?" Maysoon's question was appropriate, since many in Palestine are suffering from high blood pressure. But Suhaad replied:

No, it is not blood pressure, it is psychological pressure. I am one of those people who do not cry if they feel stressed. I just keep it inside, even if one of my children makes me angry, I keep it inside. There is no one to talk with, so you get to a point where you can't keep things inside anymore. Then it will show as disease. Most of the time I have headaches, and I feel fatigue all over my body. It is painful. Speaking about myself—I postpone everything, and it is not about having or not having time. For instance, I needed a shirt this month, but I will postpone it until a time when I can't find anything to wear...this is my life. A lot of people say that I'm a strong woman: 'God be with you, I don't know how you could pull it all together.' I feel that this is my life now and I've got used to it.

At this point in our conversation, Bilal, who was cooking lunch for himself in the kitchen adjacent to where we sat, said, "She is so indifferent to herself. I always ask her, mom, what's life to you? Life is a very, very, very beautiful thing...But if we spend it 24/7 in the kitchen cooking... really what do you do in your life?" Suhaad answered, "Recently I don't like to go out." To which, her son replied "You don't go out—and no one asks her out. Her life is work and the house. If I were her it would not be long before I committed suicide."

Through Bilal's half-joking, half-serious comment, we can glean the moral ideal of solidarity in a life where there is no evidence of peers apart from the suspicion of being harassed by them. Furthermore, what is interesting is Bilal's question, "What is life to you," which seems to mirror his sister's question to her father, "For whom did you do this?"

Now, what happens if we try to trace the lost ideal in Suhaad's account? Unlike the irrevocable losses that Freud associates with mourning, Suhaad's husband is both still there, and not there,

which provokes a different kind of sentiment from what we saw in Hadeel's account. What is concretely lost in both stories are the years without the husband, only in Suhaad's case she had given birth to their children before the onset of his imprisonment and as such her account testifies to the family's life without their father in their midst.

Yet there is another register of a loss in, and between, her words. In contrast to Hadeel's account where she kept reminding us about her strength, Suhaad sank into the depth of resigned desolation when she told us about the time her husband was a fugitive. Her's is not a story of heroic glory and worthwhile losses. She spoke of the powerlessness she felt as a mother during the nightly intrusions, and she was all too aware of the effects of them upon her children. When Bilal entered the conversation, he commented on her self-deprecating behavior in the sense of not looking after herself. Suhaad herself listed her physical torment, which she (and her doctors) link to "pressure." From her account, though, we also learn that these multiple pressures are felt to be beyond her control, to the extent that they have become internalized. **Not** acting on these, although caring for her family signals, in Bilal's eyes, that she has stopped caring about herself.

Yet, even if Suhaad's husband had in fact been released, I do not believe this would have compensated for her sense of resignation, and of pressure. Had it occurred before the Second Intifada, like it did for Hadeel's husband, this might have been so, but not today. Between then and now, Palestinians like Suhaad have collectively experienced a "loss of politics," as I call it. Words that are still used, such as "resistance" and its twin, "Sumud," have lost their evocative power (Buch Segal 2015). Why then, might we ask, is this not despair, frustration, or even simply a lack of hope? This is where melancholia can help us understand Suhaad's predicament. Her mood, of sadness, resignation, and being under pressure, takes the shape of ambivalence toward the future. This feeling of ambivalence is fueled by the impossibility of letting go of the attachment to the ideal that a struggle for freedom from the occupation may actually bring about a Palestinian state. Rather than being an object external to her, this attachment becomes inseparable from her sense of self.

Hadeel's narration, in contrast, conveyed clearly how she had decided to wait for her fiancé to be released, because that was the only possible thing she could do—for him, for herself, and not least of all, for Palestine. To her there is no clear demarcation of the boundaries between Hadeel the private person and Hadeel the Palestinian. For Suhaad, the drawing of precisely that boundary is experienced as ambivalent. Part of the explanation for this, I contend, is that according to the Palestinian ethos of Sumud, which Hadeel's narrative strongly conveys, Suhaad ought to feel differently about the political investment of herself and her husband. We may even think of Hadeel's story like a stowaway in Suhaad's account, becoming an affective presence of how it ought to feel to be her.

Such ambivalence plays out in different understandings of the struggle, not only within the collective of Palestinians but also within a family, and Suhaad's story is no exception. On a later occasion in Suhaad's home, she told us how her intellectually productive husband had written a book in response to his daughter's question, "For whom did you do this?" These words bring to the surface the smoldering question of the worth of the struggle—perhaps not for those imprisoned, but for their families. After all, there had been, at least earlier, strong communes of anticolonial pedagogy and support in the prisons among the Palestinians (Meari 2014; Nashif 2008). This support is also confirmed in the father's gesture of writing a book in reply to his daughter's accusing question. He uses the language of Sumud, of persistence, and of defending his cause, whereas her question is posed in the register of her personal relationship to her father. Could the

daughter's interrogation of her father really be countered by yet another defense for the cause? Together with Bilal asking his mother "What is life to you?" her question signposts how the structural tides of the conflict are mirrored in different generational attitudes to political engagement.

Once, upon a visit to a friend's house, I spoke about my research to her husband, a man belonging to the Palestinian diaspora who had returned for a while to work in Palestine. When I tried to communicate what was at stake for the women whose husbands were imprisoned for long periods of time, he replied with great vitality, "Yes, we should get better at taking to the streets and showing our support to the prisoners." What I did not manage to say then was that perhaps it was not so much support for the prisoners and support for the cause that was needed but acknowledgement of what it meant to be in these women's situation for years on end. His call to take to the streets, and support the struggle, derived from the memory of an earlier experience and read to me as longing for the value, impact, and, in a certain sense, positive results of the First Intifada. His reply revealed nostalgia for a past very different from the present.

In her work on the interrogation encounter between Palestinian freedom fighters and the Israeli colonial state, Lena Meari argues that "Sumud" denotes a revolutionary becoming, thus rendering the very air that the Palestinians breathe revolutionary (Meari 2014). Yet if we look at women like Suhaad, breathing this air simultaneously pressures her and her family, to the extent that not only the struggle but also her self-regard is called into question.

In Freud's description of melancholia, the lowering of self-regard figures prominently among the melancholy patients (Freud 1957[1917]:244). The cause of self-reproach, Freud argues, is not always clear yet an ambivalent relation to the lost object often figures in the patients' nosology (1957[1917]:257). If we consider the investment in the Palestinian struggle to be that which is lost in Suhaad, we are perhaps better equipped to understand her penetrating sadness and inability to look out for herself. Speaking directly about her own and particularly her husband's political engagement, Suhaad voiced the feeling that the years of imprisonment and struggle were not worth it. Here, it may be valuable to think of how melancholia, according to Freud, was more likely to occur when that which has been lost or is under threat is an *ideal* rather than an object that can be replaced. The ideal is here the twin of the Palestinian state and the immense labor of resistance it takes to bring it forward; namely, the struggle. Both are potentially lost for Suhaad, judging from her absence of vitality and her profound sadness about the ways in which the conflict has worked itself into her life.

At the same time, however, Suhaad speaks about the importance of education, of play, of a good life. In that sense, the object that is felt to be, if not lost, then fragile, is also the future. Yet to have a future in language, as Wittgenstein theorizes,¹¹ means in this context to have a Palestinian state to come into being through resistance and steadfastness. To state that the political activism was not quite worth it thus points to the ambivalence of effects of political activism in the pre-Oslo sense of that term.

The majority of Palestinian women I have come to know as both individuals and parts of a collective are neither self-obsessed nor are they self-deprecating. They have neither lost interest in the outside world nor discontinued their engagement with it. On the contrary, these women are tightly folded into relations of kin and neighborliness in which their presence is crucial (Han 2012) Yet in the case of Suhaad, when her son spoke of her life as consisting of cooking and children, and

neither she herself nor anyone else expected her life to exceed such obligations, her own story indicates, quietly, the consequences of her tireless investment in both the struggle for the ideal of a Palestinian state and her labor of love to get her children and herself through her husband's absence. Yet, despite the immense sadness that Suhaad's predicament has caused her, that predicament is nonetheless consoled with a compelling attachment to this ideal, to such an extent that it reassures her that her own, indeed the Palestinian's effort to endure and to fight the occupation will bring about its termination, some day. The name of this ambivalent attachment is melancholia. Melancholia, sutured by ambivalence and attachment, signals an "as if" reality—what if resistance was once again like the First Intifada? Suhaad, and many Palestinians with her, anticipate, albeit ambivalently, that it will be so again, showing us how the force of melancholia propels past attachment to the ideal of a Palestinian state into the future.

Concluding Thoughts

As an ambivalent attachment, melancholia derives, in Palestine, from the gap between the ideal narrative of people as living embodiments of "revolutionary becoming" and the social and political circumstances that have decimated the ideal. Because the yearning for a heroic story is fueled by the memory of how things were, earlier, it has a temporality that fits with melancholia. Yet the elusive object of longing is the future of the Palestinian state, or even simply a future in which Palestinians can imagine themselves, the attainable paradise of Darwish's poem. Melancholia develops in the gap between the anticipatory dreams of the Palestinian state and the everyday consequences of living with that fading dream. Melancholia here is the yearning that defies the languages of both past and present imaginaries of the Palestinian future. The feeling of melancholia looms large over the collective aspiration for statehood because, as a Palestinian, one is obliged to believe that this future is attainable. The attachment to the dream of Palestinian statehood produces the melancholic sentiment because it offers a hopeful horizon at the same time as it destroys the present.

Melancholia potentially exists for Palestinians of all walks who share the dream of the Palestinian state, and it is pervasive, far beyond the inner life of a few individuals, especially given the magnitude of imprisonment. To those Palestinians who can sustain this ideal, or indeed fantasy, if we follow Gammeltoft in this issue, there might be discrete experiences of loss at stake, yet most notably these are forms of loss that can be mourned, like we saw in the case of Hadeel. In the instance of this article, my focus has however been to understand the conditions and consequences of sustaining this ideal in cases where loss does not register concretely. This is a question about which scholars disagree and on which I can only speculate (cf. Gren 2015; Meari 2014) because the signs, gestures, or enunciations that could support such an argument are all indirect and ineffable or are, at most, murmured or hinted at. Yet it is precisely these areas of ethnographic inquiry that interest, and consume, me. Freud's concept of melancholia may in fact allow us to convey the pressure that Palestinians experience today and bring the hinted and murmured enunciations to language.

Melancholia holds out the promise not only to illuminate this particular case material, but also to advance anthropological theory. Anthropologists work on beliefs, values, or simply what may be considered collective registers, and melancholia has an analytical potential in investigations of the ambivalent feelings people have toward cultural values that have undergone diachronic development—such as the investment in the political project of Palestine. By focusing on ambivalent feelings, melancholia allows us to discern the complex and sometimes tattered attachment to compelling ideals like the Palestinian project, as cultural values and conditions change unevenly over time. In cases of encompassing and ongoing precarity, attention to the

explicit content of narratives and practice gets us only so far in understanding the penetrating pressure of, say, structural injustice and biomedical treatment regimes in Garcia's work, and how the occupation of the Palestinians is internalized in the article here. Insofar as internalization is the way collective bonds and ideals are lived and felt by particular people, there is a need for an analytics that does not turn away from that which is often left to the realm of the internal. In her book, *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Cheng writes about the potency of psychoanalysis in understanding precisely such processes of internalization: "The lesson of psychoanalysis speaks above all to the possibility that intrasubjectivity exists as a form of intersubjectivity and that intersubjectivity often speaks in the voice of intrasubjectivity: a mutually supportive system (2001:28). Writing about race in America, Cheng's premise for making such an argument is distinct from an investigation that is not cast along racial differences. Her premise, nonetheless, that the subject does not exist in insular singularity from the social bonds around her is the recognition per se that has compelled me to invite psychoanalysis into an analysis of the ambivalent attachment to the ideal of Palestinian statehood.

Freud's concept of melancholia lends itself particularly well to the study of such internalization, given his acknowledgement that the loss of an ideal, or feeling the threat of losing it, can cause devastating distress in the afflicted. Most importantly, because this is not a proper object loss, the indeterminacy intrinsic to it registers as ambivalent attachment. Secondly, by acknowledging how collective ideals are in fact as existential as they are political, we can better understand how ambivalent attachment to a cultural ideal causes anguish because people feel obliged and torn by it as well as ambivalent towards it.

Finally, melancholia offers a way to understand the depth to which history, and particularly a painful history of ongoing colonization, is lived intersubjectively. As such, melancholia is a fine companion to anthropological analysis of how people respond to and are marked by political pressure that is simultaneously political and deeply personal.

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Notes

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¹ For a discussion of this see Throop 2010b.

² See for instance the influential volume, *Postcolonial Disorders*, edited by Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good, Sandra Teresa Hyde, Sarah Pinto and Byron J. Good (2008). Another significant strand of thinking about subjectivity is of course Joao Biehl's work, as it figures in *Vita* (2005, 2014) <<place the Vita citation in reference section>>, and in the volume 'Subjectivity' coedited with Byron Good and Arthur Kleinman (2007).

³ In the powerful volume, *Postcolonial Disorders*, Sarah Pinto too has used melancholia to discuss bereavement in the postcolonial context of Rural India (Pinto 2008) and Thomas Blom Hansen has argued that there is a sense of melancholic longing for the past among black South Africans (Blom Hansen 2013).

⁴ There are other significant aspects of the concept of melancholia which may arguably have helped me understand the ambivalent attachment to the revolutionary ideal in Palestine. Among the ideas I have left out in this article is Freud's suggestion that the melancholic shifts between moods of devastation and manic activity as well as the argument that the melancholy patient symbolically devours his loved/lost object. Those ideas are, to me, too close to a clinical exegesis, which neither my material nor my training (as an anthropologist, not a psychoanalyst) allows for.

⁵ The issue of singling out my interlocutor's pursuit of the good life in the face of occupation speaks directly to the discussion of the suffering subject in anthropology. In my forthcoming book, *No Place for Grief* (in press), I align myself with Veena Das's and Clara Han's interventions on the subject. In her work, *Affliction* (2015) <<place the citation in reference section>>, Das argues that ethnographically there is no distinction between suffering and the pursuit of the good/that ethnographically suffering and the pursuit of the good are inseparable. Rather, the interesting issue is how they come to be braided in everyday life. In her response to the authors in a book forum on her monograph, *Life in Debt*, Han relatedly makes the argument that when investigating situations of duress, ethnographers are often compelled to make the choice to either describe "the good" that emerges despite hardship or to describe human beings' capacity to suffer (2013: 231). As I write in my book, my concern is describing what life is like at the threshold of endurance and exhaustion because this is a question arising through my ethnography (Segal in press: 173).

⁶ In an essay on how anthropology engages the discipline of philosophy, Jackson reminds us that the application of Freud, and indeed Western thought, to lives outside of that context, carries a colonial assumption of the scientific "I" that is able to use observational and measuring skills to penetrate the unconscious of the other (Jackson 2014:47). That colonial assumption is naturally doubly problematic in the context of colonized Palestine. However, Jackson also argues that philosophy is a fine companion in his work, because it affords him a distance from which to analyze detailed ethnography as it moves toward the more generalized conversations about the human condition that anthropology aspires to achieve (Jackson 2014.:27). I have turned to Freud's work on mourning and melancholia in this same spirit, in the hope that it allows us a distance from which to think about loss without a clear referent in Palestine.

⁷ Noget med kvinder og fængsling

⁸ http://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners.

⁹ Area A is under complete civil and security control by the Palestinian Authority. The actual area is approximately 3 percent of the West Bank, exclusive/excluding East Jerusalem. Area B, which covers roughly 23-25 percent of the West Bank, is under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control. Lastly, area C is controlled fully by Israel (Kelly 2006).

¹⁰ The important issue of the rise of the NGO middle class in Palestine has been extensively studied by Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar (2005) as well as Lori Allen (2013).